

## New NYC Subway Murals Challenge the Authority of Maps

At 68th Street–Hunter College station, a new trio of mosaics by professor Lisa Corinne Davis is a dizzying exploration of the art of cartography.

30 January 2025 | By Isa Farfan

Across New York City’s subway system, transit maps displaying colored-coded train routes help riders visualize their location and guide them to their destination. But at Manhattan’s 68th Street–Hunter College station, a new trio of mosaic murals offers a disorienting exploration of the art of cartography and its authority.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Arts and Design commissioned Lisa Corinne Davis, a Brooklyn-based abstract painter and a professor of art and co-MFA director at the Upper East Side college, to create three glass mosaics for the transit stop, inaugurated on January 23. Davis’s “Tempestuous Terrain” (2024), spanning a 29-foot curved wall at one of the station’s entrances, and two adjacent works titled “Liminal Location” (2024) situated in front of an MTA service booth, now fill nearly 370 square feet of the student-traversed station.

The unveiling of the artworks coincides with the completion of a \$177 million project to make the station fully accessible.



Lisa Corinne Davis, *Liminal Location* (2024). Photo by JSP Art Photography, courtesy MTA Arts and Design.

Davis said the works were translated from her paintings, often resembling mapped spaces, which she describes as concerning “inventive geography” and explorations of race, culture, and history.

Over the years, Davis explained in her MTA artwork proposal shared with *Hyperallergic*, she has observed an intersection of the lives of individuals from various racial, political, and social groups in the neighborhood fostered by the presence of Hunter College. According to the MTA, the station serves 20,000 daily riders.

“Their interaction fills this station with ample evidence of both the realities and aspirations of social and geographic mobility,” Davis wrote in her proposal. “It is a place where intersecting worlds collide and coexist en route to other actual, metaphorical, or metaphysical destinations.”

“Liminal Location,” which hugs two staircases leading to the Uptown and Downtown green-line 6 train parallels the colors of MTA’s subway map which shows New York City transit routes represented by crisscrossing blue, orange, green, yellow, red, and purple lines surrounded by a light blue body of water. In Davis’s mosaic, fragmented tiles of the same colors appear in front of a light blue background.

“Even though many maps are lies, a map is made with geometric shapes and primary colors and black and white; we just assume that it is delivering facts to us,” Davis told *Hyperallergic* in a 2020 interview. “I am constantly playing with whether you can trust what you are seeing in the work.”

Lisa Rhodes, a nurse at a nearby doctor’s office who was exiting the subway station on Tuesday, January 28, remarked that “Tempestuous Terrain” — which features a palette evocative of the transit map — commenting that the mosaic was “lovely.”

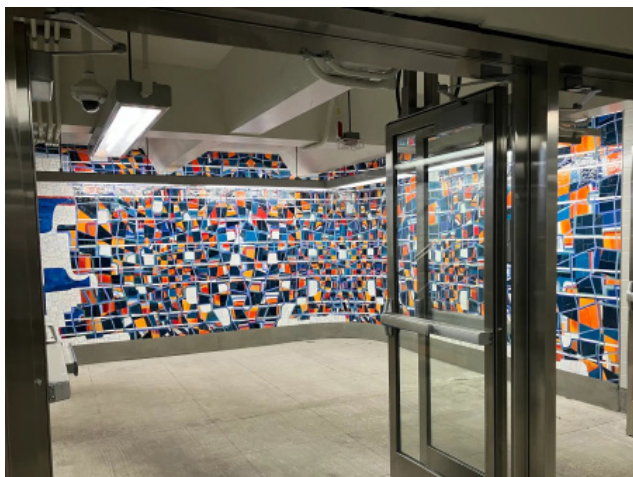


Detail of *Liminal Location* (2024). Commissioned by MTA Arts & Design. Photo courtesy of Isa Farfan/Hyperallergic.

“I’m very happy that it’s all done and bright and beautiful,” Rhodes told *Hyperallergic*.

On the platform below Davis’s murals, Miranda Fallon, a historical preservation specialist, was supervising a project to replace older tile mosaic bands that run along the subway platform walls that were deteriorating.

“I love new public art,” Fallon told *Hyperallergic* on Tuesday. “Especially somewhere like a subway station. Anything to make it more beautiful is really nice.”



*Tempestuous Terrain* (2024) located at NYCT 68 St-Hunter College Station. Commissioned by MTA Arts & Design. Photo courtesy of Isa Farfan/Hyperallergic.

In her proposal, Davis also said the medium of mosaic, because of its composition of many individual parts, was particularly well suited to portray an abstract representation of the traversals occurring at Hunter College and the subway station.

“I raise questions that leave room for the viewer to navigate the meaning,” Davis wrote. On Manhattan’s East Side, the installation joins other permanent artworks in the MTA system, including Glenn Goldberg’s “Bronx River” (2023) at the East 149th Street station and Katherine Bradford’s “Queens of the Night” (2021) at the 1st Avenue subway stop.